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On the Problem of the Tasks of the Navy and Methods for Accomplishing Them

by

Admiral V. Kasatonov

In Admiral V. Platonov's article "On the Tasks of the Navy and Methods for Accomplishing Them,"* he cited several important propositions about naval operations in a future war. In our opinion, however, several of them are debatable, and in connection with this we want to set forth our opinion of them.

In examining the task of destroying carrier strike large units, the author expressed doubt that their combat activities would be carried out mainly on the open sea. We think there is no basis for such a doubt.

In the opinion of Western military specialists, besides the large units of fire of nuclear warheads (more than 100 nuclear bombs on each aircraft carrier), the strength of carrier strike large units is precisely their great maneuverability and their ability to deliver strikes with nuclear weapons on a broad front. It is precisely for this reason that they consider carrier strike large units a more reliable and stable means of combat in comparison with shore-based aircraft and ground missile units.

It is not without reason that the NATO command thinks that ground airfields and areas of missile launch sites can be reconnoitered even before the beginning of combat operations and subjected to powerful strikes by nuclear missiles in the initial hours and minutes of a war. Carrier strike large units, however, are capable of performing a maneuver of 1000 km in one calendar day in any direction and are less vulnerable. For the present they cannot be destroyed by missile strikes from the shore, and the reconnaissance of carrier strike large units on the sea and the directing of submarines and aircraft against them is a very complicated task.

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* Special Collection of Articles of the Journal "Military Thought", Issue Two, 1961.

The experience of numerous exercises of the carrier strike fleets of the USA and the NATO joint naval forces proves that the basic method of operations of carrier strike large units is their delivery of strikes from areas on the open sea. In particular, at the maneuvers of the NATO joint armed forces which were held in autumn of 1960, aircraft carriers participating in the general nuclear attack delivered their strikes against very important objectives of the "enemy" from a distance of up to 2000 km in a zone with a front of up to 1700 km. Here the carrier strike groups constantly maneuvered within the bounds of the Norwegian Sea and combined the maneuver with measures of radio silence in the networks of long-range radio communication. The American 6th Fleet operated in a similar way in the Mediterranean Sea.

It is possible for the carrier strike large units to put in to shore waters, particularly into shore bases, only in particular cases. Usually the carrier strike groups put in to render direct support to ground troops, particularly to put ashore an amphibious landing force. For example, that was the reason why the strike aircraft carriers entered the Aegean Sea in the final stages of the concluding maneuvers of the NATO joint armed forces (OVS) in 1957 and 1960.

It should be borne in mind that by operating in shore waters with fiords, all other enemy ships can be camouflaged successfully against the background of islands or the shore, but aircraft carriers will be exposed when their aircraft take off. Besides that, they can be detected by intelligence agents. As an example of this, one can cite the constant surveillance conducted by our and the British intelligence during the past war of the large German ships in the Norwegian fiords. Under modern conditions, after having been discovered in areas which are too small for maneuvering, aircraft carriers can be destroyed with great accuracy by nuclear strikes from missile troops. It is clear that the enemy will try as far as possible to avoid such areas.

One cannot quite understand the author's idea that in remote areas of the ocean, "carrier strike large units can function only as cover forces for convoys or within

the complement of hunter-killer groups of the antisubmarine defense" (Page 3). As is well known, the carrier strike large units, like the fleet strike force, are intended not to cover convoys but to deliver strikes against important military, industrial, and administrative installations and against ports and naval bases. They are also capable of delivering strikes against ships and vessels on the sea. From whom can carrier strike large units conceal convoys in remote areas of the ocean? It is obvious that such a task could be given the carrier strike large units only if the probable enemy could expect attacks against his convoys from large surface vessels, for example, from aircraft carriers. Because the probable enemy does not expect such operations from us, one can suppose that he will not charge the carrier strike large units with such tasks.

Covering convoys and carrier strike large units from submarine strikes is carried out by carrier hunter-killer groups which are especially assigned for this purpose, and at the basis of these groups are not strike aircraft carriers but aircraft carriers of the antisubmarine defense.

By using the carrier hunter-killer groups, the enemy, as was correctly noted by Admiral V. Platonov, of course will strive to clear our submarines from the areas where carrier strike large units are maneuvering. However, one must not overestimate his capabilities for accomplishing this task. The areas where the carrier strike large units are maneuvering are quite large and occupy hundreds of thousands of square kilometers. Moreover, one must inspect not only the areas of combat maneuvering but also the areas where the strike fleet is formed, where ships are refueled, waiting areas for servicing, and areas with the routes of the carrier strike large units and other operational groups of the strike fleet. Even the successive execution of preliminary searches in these areas to clear them of submarines would require bringing in tens of carrier hunter-killer groups of the antisubmarine defense, and this exceeds the bounds of the real capabilities of the probable enemy, particularly if one considers that such operations must be carried out simultaneously in several zones of the world ocean.

For reliable, direct protection of carrier strike large units and convoys operating in antiatomic combat formations, one also must have a large number of antisubmarine forces and weapons.

Despite the fact that our probable enemies have at their disposal a developed shipbuilding industry, their capabilities for building the needed number of ships and planes of the antisubmarine defense to fight our submarines are not limitless. These capabilities can be limited even more as a result of strikes by missile troops and by missile submarines against the centers of the shipbuilding industry and the bases of the enemy's antisubmarine forces.

We are completely aware that the operations of diesel-electric submarines, particularly against carrier strike large units and fast, strongly protected convoys, will be conducted with great difficulties. However, even these submarines will be able to operate successfully against less fast-moving targets.

The operations of atomic submarines will undoubtedly be more effective. The great maneuvering capabilities and the enormous range of these boats make it possible for them to be used to deliver strikes against carrier strike large units not only in areas of combat maneuvering of the latter and in the approaches to them but also on the lanes used by the carrier strike large units in crossing the ocean and on the approaches to distant bases across the ocean.

Without being inferior in speed to aircraft carriers, and exceeding the speed of the fastest convoys by 1.5 to 2 times, the atomic submarines can attack them from any direction and avoid encounters with the hunter-killer groups of the antisubmarine defense which usually take up positions in forward areas of the movement of the carrier strike large units or the convoy.

The use of atomic torpedoes increases even more the combat capabilities of the submarines. Incidentally, we cannot agree in any way with Admiral V. Platonov in his negative evaluation of atomic torpedoes, much less

the long range ones (Page 9). The advantages of atomic torpedoes are obvious. Thus, to destroy a ship of any class, it is sufficient to strike it with one atomic torpedo within a semicircle with a radius equal to the radius of destruction of the given target. We note that to destroy any ship such as a strike aircraft carrier, we must hit it with no less than 8 to 10 torpedoes with conventional filling. As a result of the fact that to destroy a ship with an atomic torpedo, it is sufficient not to guarantee striking the ship directly but in a semicircle with a sizable radius, the probability of destroying the target with this torpedo increases greatly and in several instances approaches one.

Finally, one must keep in mind that in using torpedoes with conventional charges, because of their small radius of destruction, the firing is usually done by four-torpedo salvos, but in using atomic torpedoes the firing is done with single torpedoes. Therefore, if a submarine replaces conventional torpedoes with atomic ones, then with the use of the same number of torpedoes, the number of possible effective attacks increases by four times, i.e., the self-sufficiency of a submarine in ammunition increases by four times.

Considering the great self-sufficiency of carrier strike large units, which is reinforced by the mobile system for supplying and servicing them on the sea, the basic efforts by our Navy must be directed at fighting them on the open sea and ocean: at the approaches to probable areas of combat operations, directly in those areas, and also on the ocean lanes used by the carrier strike large units from remote rear bases and at exits from those bases.

We think that by using and clearly organizing a sufficient amount of forces and means of reconnaissance, the successful operations of our forces -- submarines and aircraft -- can and must be organized against the carrier strike large units on the open sea.

It is also difficult to agree with the author of the article on the evaluation which he gives of the long-range possibilities of atomic aircraft (Page 4). In our opinion,

the insufficient range at low altitudes and the low self-sufficiency of modern aircraft, even the largest jet aircraft, is a serious hindrance impeding their use in distant areas of the ocean in coordination with submarines. The impossibility of long flights at low altitudes to a considerable degree causes the great vulnerability of modern aircraft to anti-aircraft weapons.

Apparently, aircraft using atomic energy will be able to fly for quite a long time at low altitudes and at any distance from their airfields, and they will be shot down much less frequently by antiaircraft weapons than were their piston and jet predecessors.

According to theory, , the atomic airplane can become an almost invulnerable and quite effective weapon of armed combat on the sea in conducting combat operations against a carrier strike large unit, convoys, and missile-carrying submarines.

One must keep in mind that a missile-carrying aircraft possesses a very valuable feature -- in launching its missiles it itself observes the objective of the strike and directs the missile to the target, i.e., it operates without any intermediate means, and because of this, errors in determining the location of the target by reconnaissance means are excluded, as well as any influence on the accuracy of the firing by the movement of the target during the missile's flight.

We basically agree with the opinion of Admiral V. Platonov about the degree of threat from enemy missile-carrying submarines and on the ways of combating them at the modern stage of the development of our antisubmarine defense forces and weapons. It is true that at the present time the real strength in the fight against missile-carrying submarines can be fast submarines of the anti-submarine defense which are specially equipped to accomplish this task.. There is also no doubt about the methods of combat operations of antisubmarine submarines proposed in the article.

However, one cannot completely agree with the author of the article when he says that there is no other way to

combat missile-carrying submarines. In our opinion, the use of a single weapon (the submarines of the antisubmarine defense) in the struggle against such a formidable enemy as missile-carrying submarines is an emergency measure caused by the status and capabilities of the antisubmarine forces and weapons at the given moment.

Although possessing several indisputable advantages in comparison with other forces of the antisubmarine defense, the submarines of the antisubmarine defense also have their shortcomings. The chief shortcoming is that even with the sharp increase in the range of detection of submarines by hydroacoustic means of surveillance, detailing submarines of the antisubmarine defense for the reliable accomplishment of this task must be excessively large and must amount to not tens but hundreds of atomic submarines. This, obviously, cannot be guaranteed for a comparatively long time. Moreover, having predominance in the world ocean in surface and air forces, the probable enemy can use, in his fight against our submarines, besides his own submarines of the antisubmarine defense, surface ships, dirigibles, and aircraft of the antisubmarine defense from land bases and from aircraft carriers. This will place our submarines of the antisubmarine defense in an unequal position with the enemy submarines, and this even further decreases the reliability of accomplishing the task of combating them.

On the basis of these considerations, it is extremely desirable to bring in other forces besides the submarines of the antisubmarine defense for the struggle against missile-carrying submarines. These should be forces which would be able as much as possible to compensate for the shortcomings inherent in antisubmarine submarines.

In this plan we do not share the very pessimistic evaluation expressed by Admiral V. Platonov regarding naval aviation. It is obvious that, provided the means of detecting submarines by aircraft are improved, and the flight range of aircraft at low altitudes is increased, aircraft will be able to increase the effectiveness of the struggle against missile-carrying submarines in coordination with submarines of the antisubmarine defense.

Apparently, the new possibilities in accomplishing this important task may take into account orbital means of combat which are based on the use of artificial earth satellites.

In our opinion, the essence of the problem is to create effective means for the distant detection of submarines from the air which will make it possible to employ for their destruction the most effective modern means of destruction -- missiles with nuclear charges launched from submarines or aircraft and possibly also from shore launching mounts.

It would be incorrect to rule out the possibility of creating other means of detection. Considering the great seriousness of the threat of missile-carrying submarines for our country and the other countries of the Socialist Camp in the event a war breaks out, we must set such a task before Soviet scientists.

Thus, as the bases for accomplishing the task of combating missile-carrying submarines, we must place not just one means of combat, but a set of means, the main ones of which are submarines, aircraft, and possibly, orbital means of combat.

In examining the task of combating enemy ocean transportation, the author of the article maintains that under modern conditions the need arises to choose, as the main objective for strikes by our forces, not transports, but aircraft carriers (Page 8). We cannot agree with that statement. In our opinion, it is caused by an obvious overestimation of the capabilities of our probable enemy to cover and defend his convoys. For this purpose the enemy may use aircraft carriers only within the complement of carrier hunter-killer groups or for direct safeguarding to protect only a relatively small number of the most valuable convoys. A considerable number of convoys and transports will follow the ocean lanes without cover by aircraft carriers. (We have already mentioned that carrier strike large units haye a very small bearing on the direct protection of convoys.)

Moreover, it is quite difficult to guarantee the selective destruction of aircraft carriers among all the ships and transports of a convoy, even from a purely tactical viewpoint. It is obvious that submarines armed with torpedoes will launch their torpedoes against the nearest large ship or transport during an attack, and strikes by missiles with nuclear warheads from submarines and aircraft must be delivered against the main body of the convoy, i.e., against the transports, calculating on destroying as many of them as possible. Any other solution of the task is scarcely admissible.

Of course, when one has the opportunity to choose between attacking either a transport or an aircraft carrier, preference should be given to the latter. However, in principle, the main objectives for strikes by naval forces in combat with enemy ocean shipping, just as previously, remain the transports with troops and cargo, and the task of disrupting shipping can be accomplished only by destroying a definite proportion of the enemy's transport tonnage.